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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

Agricultural Land Commission

2006/07 – 2008/09 SERVICE PLAN

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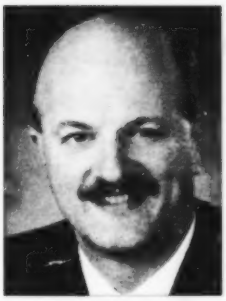

Message from the Minister and Accountability Statement

As the minister responsible for the Agricultural Land Commission, I am pleased to present the 2006/07 – 2008/09 Service Plan for the Agricultural Land Commission.

B.C.'s fertile lands yield some of the world's highest quality agricultural and food products. We produce a greater variety of agricultural products over a wider range of geographical and climatic conditions than any other area in Canada. A high quality agricultural land base has long been the cornerstone of B.C.'s farm economy and is an important resource for the future. That is why B.C. has preserved five per cent of our entire land base — our best agricultural lands — for food production within the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The ALR currently covers approximately 4.7 million hectares that include private and public lands. Land is added to the ALR as well as excluded, and since 2001, the Agricultural Land Reserve has been larger than at any time in its existence since 1974.

The Agricultural Land Commission administers the ALR as an arms'-length administrative tribunal. Although the Chair reports to me, the Commission operates independently within the framework of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. Its members are entrusted by the government to preserve agricultural land, to encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia and to consider community interests.

The six-panel regional structure that our government established in 2002 is balancing provincial interest with community needs. I expect the Commission to continue to contribute to communities by making balanced decisions to preserve agricultural land, decisions that will contribute to the government's goals of leading the world in sustainable environmental management and creating jobs for British Columbians.

The Agricultural Land Commission 2006/07 – 2008/09 Service Plan was prepared under my direction in accordance with the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act*. I am responsible for the basis on which the plan has been prepared. All material fiscal assumptions and policy decisions as of February 15, 2006 have been considered in preparing the plan and I am accountable for achieving the specific objectives in the plan.

Honourable Pat Bell
Minister of Agriculture and Lands

February 15, 2006

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Commission Overview

Purpose of Commission

The Agricultural Land Commission is the provincial agency responsible for administering the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR), a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The purposes of the Commission are:

a) to preserve agricultural land;

b) to encourage farming on agricultural land in collaboration with other communities of interest; and

c) to encourage local governments, First Nations, the government and its agents to enable and accommodate farm use of agricultural land and uses compatible with agriculture in their plans, bylaws and policies.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* sets out processes for land use approvals including the inclusion or removal of land from the ALR and non-farm uses and subdivisions of land within the ALR. The Act is supported by the Agricultural Land Reserve Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation, which details procedures for applications and defines permitted land uses and land subdivisions within the ALR.

The Act is administered by a government-appointed Commission consisting of 19 members including a Chair and six panels for six geographical regions of the province. Each panel has three members including a Vice-chair. The Commission is supported by a staff of 22 full time equivalent employees (FTE's).

Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

A land base in British Columbia reserved for farming.

Mission

Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

Values

The Commission is committed to the following values:

- **Integration** — Policies and programs foster long-term sustainability by considering a range of economic, social and environmental values.
- **Accountability and fairness** — The Commission sets performance standards, monitors compliance and reports on progress. The Commission acts fairly and in the public interest.
- **Transparency** — The Commission establishes open processes; the bases of all decisions are public information.
- **Science and knowledge** — Agricultural Land Reserve boundaries and decisions are based on biophysical criteria, local knowledge and site specific circumstances.
- **Responsiveness** — In carrying out its responsibilities, the Commission considers the needs of farmers, landowners, applicants, First Nations, local governments and others.
- **Shared responsibility** — The Commission strives to develop positive working relationships with local governments, First Nations and others and to ensure consultation with all stakeholders in its decisions and activities.
- **Certainty** — The Commission makes clear and timely decisions within a predictable and understandable regulatory framework.

Strategic Context

The Commission will continue to play the lead role in agricultural land preservation and in doing so, will make a positive contribution towards achieving one of government's Five Great Goals of leading the world in sustainable environmental management. The Commission's continuing efforts to work with stakeholders to encourage and enable farming and farm businesses in the ALR will also contribute positively to another of government's Five Great Goals of creating more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

The Agricultural Land Commission operates within a dynamic environment influenced by diverse and often competing interests as well as broader agricultural, land use, environmental, economic and societal trends. To achieve its mandate, the Commission must be cognizant of how these interests and trends impact on its activities and must be prepared to respond to the associated risks and opportunities.

A Commission interacts with a number of key stakeholders and partners, including other government ministries and agencies, local governments, land owners and First Nations. Key relationship issues include the following:

- The BC Treaty Consultation Process seeks to resolve the outstanding claims of First Nations through negotiated settlements. Land offered as treaty settlement land will in some cases include an unknown amount of ALR, placing pressure on the Commission to exclude agricultural land to facilitate treaty settlements. Treaty settlements also present the opportunity for the Commission to develop partnerships with First Nations for the management of agricultural resources on lands within First Nations' jurisdiction. The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides First Nations with authorities and responsibilities similar to local governments under the Act, including the ability to file applications with the Commission.
- The recent reorganization of the B.C. government placed the Commission within the purview of the Minister of Agriculture and Lands. The alignment of the Commission with the ministry presents an opportunity to enhance the existing working relationship with the ministry and with other partners with a view to maximizing its effectiveness and contribution to the mandates of both organizations.

Significant trends and strategic issues that impact the Commission include the following:

- Population growth, demographic changes and housing trends such as a declining household size will fuel demand for land to meet housing requirements and non-residential development. These pressures will be most evident in the Lower Mainland, southern Vancouver Island and the Okanagan Valley, which together account for 80 per cent of farm cash receipts. The Commission must work vigorously

with local governments and others to preserve agricultural lands in the face of mounting pressure for non-agricultural development.

- Population growth within B.C. and within potential export markets, together with changing consumer preferences, will create an expanding potential market for B.C. agricultural products. The Commission must ensure that the ALR provides B.C. farmers with a secure and flexible land base on which to do business so that they are in a position to capitalize on emerging market opportunities.

Core Business Area

The core business of the Agricultural Land Commission is the preservation of agricultural land through the administration of the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*. The business of the Commission is carried out through three functional areas:

Land Use Planning and Application Processing

The Commission reviews and decides applications under the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and enforces compliance with the Act and regulations. In addition to deciding land use applications under the Act, the Commission reviews plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation. The Commission works with many stakeholders including individuals, farm organizations, local governments and First Nations to support farm development and to remove unnecessary obstacles to farm expansion in their areas.

Strategic Planning and Corporate Policy

The Commission develops strategies, plans and policies to achieve the goals and objectives set out in the Service Plan. The Commission also participates in the agricultural planning and policy initiatives of other ministries, agencies and local governments.

Administration and Information Systems

The above two functions are supported by an administration, records management and information systems unit. This includes maintenance of an application database and ALR maps for the province.

Resource Summary

The Agricultural Land Commission operates under a single sub-vote of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands as specified in the *Estimates*.

	2005/06 Restated Estimates[1]	2006/07 Estimates	2007/08 Plan	2008/09 Plan
Operating Expenses ($000)				
Agricultural Land Commission:	2,068	2,108	2,104	2,104
Total	**2,068**	**2,108**	**2,104**	**2,104**
Full-time Equivalents (FTEs)				
Agricultural Land Commission:	21	22	22	22
Total	**21**	**22**	**22**	**22**
Capital Expenditures (Consolidated Revenue Fund) ($000)				
Agricultural Land Commission:	15	15	5	5
Total	**15**	**15**	**5**	**5**

[1] These amounts have been restated, for comparative purposes only, to be consistent with the presentation of the 2006/07 *Estimates*. Schedule A of the 2006/07 *Estimates* presents a detailed reconciliation.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies and Results

Overview

Commission Goals

The Commission has set two goals critical to achieving its vision of a land base reserved for farming:

1. **Preservation of agricultural land.** Agricultural land comprises less than five per cent of the total land area of British Columbia. There is ongoing pressure to convert this limited agricultural land to non-agricultural uses. The Commission protects agricultural land in B.C. through the Agricultural Land Reserve or ALR, a provincial land use zone in favour of agriculture. The ALR provides an agricultural land base that supports, and creates opportunities for, a safe and secure source of food and other agricultural products. The protected land base also provides for agricultural expansion and compatible economic activities.
2. **A land use framework that encourages and enables farming.** The land use framework for agriculture includes the *Agricultural Land Commission Act*, local government land use plans and by-laws, and the legislation, plans and policies of other ministries and agencies that affect agricultural land use.

   The ALR is a working agricultural land base. The utilization of the ALR for agricultural production contributes to the economy, stabilizes rural communities and provides a safe and secure food supply. The Commission shares the responsibility for encouraging farm use of agricultural lands with its key partners. These include over 130 local governments, the agricultural sector and its professional organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, other ministries and agencies, Agriculture Canada and other federal agencies, and First Nations.

Linkage to the Five Great Goals

The goals of the Commission are aligned with two of the Five Great Goals set by the government. The Commission goal of the "Preservation of agricultural land" relates to the long-term management of a resource base for both current and future needs. It contributes to the Great Goal "To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management — bar none."

The Commission goal of "A land use framework that encourages and enables farming" relates to providing a business environment for agriculture. It contributes to the Great Goal "To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada."

Cross Ministry Initiatives

The Commission works closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands on issues, programs and initiatives intended to improve land use planning for agriculture. Ministry and Commission staff utilize a team approach to participating in local government planning and by-law initiatives that impact agriculture.

Performance Plan

Goal 1: *Preservation of agricultural land.*

Objective 1: *Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR.*

The suitability of land for agriculture is the primary consideration in whether land should be included or removed from the ALR. The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* provides processes for landowners, local governments and First Nations to apply to the Commission to include or remove land from the ALR.

Strategies: *The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve this objective:*

- The Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR; and
- The Commission reviews the plans and bylaws of local governments and other agencies to ensure that the ALR is properly identified and that the policies are supportive of the ALR and farmland preservation.

Performance Measure:

The amount of land with capability for agriculture is finite and its location is fixed, although the suitability of agricultural land may change over time as a result of factors such as surrounding development and investment in agricultural infrastructure. The Commission, through the application process, includes or excludes land from the Reserve based on suitability for agriculture. The Commission also may exclude suitable agricultural land to meet community needs in cases where no alternatives exist.

The net change in the size of the ALR is an indicator of the stability of the agricultural land base. A relatively stable or increasing net size of the ALR indicates that lands suitable for agriculture are being retained in the ALR.

Performance Measure	2005/06 Actual Base	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target	2008/09 Target
Per cent net change in land in the ALR by region	< 0.02 % decrease (04/05 – last full reporting period for which figures are available)	< 0.1% decrease over 06/07 to 08/09 period	New baseline and targets to be developed specific to each region	

Objective 2: *Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.*

Commission decisions should not result in negative impacts on the agricultural suitability of lands subject to the decision or on surrounding agricultural lands.

The *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and the Regulation permit a number of non-agricultural uses and subdivisions of land within the ALR that are considered to be compatible with agriculture. The Act also provides processes for landowners, local governments and First Nations to apply to the Commission for land use changes and subdivisions within the ALR that are not permitted outright by the Act and Regulation.

Strategies: *The Commission employs the following strategy to achieve this objective:*

- The Commission decides applications with the objective of ensuring that these land use changes do not diminish the suitability of lands within the ALR for agriculture.

Performance Measure:

The Commission reviews non-farm use and subdivision applications on a case-by-case basis and considers the merits of each application. An assessment of the potential impact on agricultural suitability relies heavily on the experience and judgement of the Commission. Depending on the circumstances, the Commission may give different weights to considerations such as the compatibility of the proposed use with agriculture, soil capability of the land, location and whether the proposed use would meet a pressing community need. After balancing the relevant considerations, the Commission may approve an application that it determines would not diminish the suitability of land for agriculture.

Because the specific circumstance of each application is unique, it is difficult to evaluate the impact of Commission decisions on the 4.7 million hectare ALR land base. The Commission refuses most applications that would diminish the suitability of land for agriculture while approving those applications that do not diminish the lands suitability.

Some approvals granted on the basis that they meet a pressing community need may have an impact on suitability for agriculture. A significant increase in approvals based on community need indicates the increased likelihood that the overall suitability of land for

agriculture is being compromised. Note that community need is a factor in some decisions where poor agricultural suitability is also a factor. The indicator will only include decisions where community need is the primary factor in the decision.

Performance Measure	2005/06 Base	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target	2008/09 Target
Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need	Community need comprised 3.4% of approvals	Community need comprises < 2% of approvals	Community need comprises < 2% of approvals	Community need comprises < 2% of approvals

Goal 2: *A land use framework that encourages and enables farming.*

Objective: *Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming.*

Other agencies, including local governments, have regulatory responsibilities with respect to lands in the ALR. The plans, policies and activities of local governments and other agencies can have the effect of unduly restricting agriculture, or conversely, may encourage and enable agriculture. To contribute to the success of the agricultural sector, the Commission works to ensure that its plans and policies and those of its key partners permit and enable the use of the ALR for agriculture.

Strategies: *The Commission employs the following strategies to achieve this objective:*

- The publication of guidelines to assist local governments and other agencies with land use responsibilities to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging and enabling farming is addressed by their plans and policies; and
- The selective audit of local government official community plans to determine consistency with the guidelines, legislation and regulations. The Commission is working towards results-based processes and has established guidelines to ensure that the provincial interest in encouraging farming is addressed by jurisdictions with land use responsibilities.

Performance Measures:

The change in the number of local government official community plans that are consistent with the *Agricultural Land Commission Act* and with the Commission's guidelines is an indicator of the Commission's success in working with others to encourage, enable and accommodate farming. The Commission is moving from reviewing all plans and by-laws of local government to a risk-based program of comprehensive audits of a sample of plans with ALR. Local government plans are evaluated to determine their consistency with the

Act and Commission guidelines and the degree to which they encourage farming in the ALR. The Commission expects the number of plans that effectively encourage farming will increase over time, with a specific target to be established after a baseline is determined.

The Commission, along with the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands also encourages local governments to adopt agricultural area plans that support agriculture. An increase in the number of plans adopted is another indicator of the Commission and Ministry's success in encouraging, enabling and accommodating farming.

Performance Measures	2005/06 Base	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target	2008/09 Target
Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable agriculture	Completion of audit plan and establish baseline by end of fiscal	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development)	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development)	Increase in plans that encourage agriculture (under development)
Number of agricultural area plans	15	16	18	18

Commission Performance Plan Summary

Agricultural Land Commission Mission
Preserve agricultural land and encourage and enable farm businesses throughout British Columbia.

Five Great Goals	ALC Goals	ALC Objectives	Performance Measures and Targets
To lead the world in sustainable environmental management, with the best air and water quality, and the best fisheries management — bar none	1. Preservation of agricultural land	1. Lands suitable for agriculture are retained in the ALR	Per cent net change in land area in the ALR by region
		2. Commission decisions do not significantly diminish the suitability of land for agriculture	Per cent of decisions for non-farm use and subdivision approved on the basis of community need
To create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada	2. A land use framework that encourages and enables farming	1. Plans, policies and activities of the Commission, local governments, ministries, agencies and First Nations encourage and enable farming	Per cent of official community plans that encourage and enable farming
			Number of local government agricultural area plans

Related Initiatives and Planning Processes

Deregulation and Regulatory Reform

The Commission will support Government's Regulatory Reform initiatives by committing to controlling regulatory burden and improving regulatory quality by:

- Identifying at least one regulatory reform opportunity that will shift the Commission's regulations to be more citizen centred, cost-effective, results-based, and responsive to our clients by reducing and/or streamlining the steps or business processes involved in complying with provincial regulations; and
- Adhering to the regulatory criteria set out in the Regulatory Reform Policy, and targeting a zero per cent net increase in regulation through 2008/09.

The table below lists the Commission's most significant deregulation and regulatory reform initiatives.

Objective	Performance Measures	2005/06 Actual Base	2006/07 Target	2007/08 Target	2008/09 Target
Streamline application processing	Processing time for applications	70% of applications decided within 90 days (estimate)	80% of applications decided within 90 days		
Zero per cent increase to regulatory burden throughout 2006/07	Regulatory requirements maintained at June 2004 baseline	223	0%	0%	0%

Information Resource Management Plan

The Agricultural Land Commission Information Resource Management Plan is available on the Commission website at:
http://www.alc.gov.bc.ca/relatedplanningprocesses/overview.html.